

4/17/24

Honorable Chairman Kenneth Weyler  
House Finance Committee  
Legislative Office Building Rooms 210-211  
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 499

Dear Chairman Weyler and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I am the Public Policy Assistant at NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI NH is a non-profit, grassroots organization whose mission is to improve the lives of all people impacted by mental illness and suicide through support, education and advocacy. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak in support of SB 499, relative to reduction of hunger for children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

A variety of complex factors contribute to an individual's mental health and wellbeing. These factors include housing, education, social inclusion, and more, but one key determinant is food security and hunger. When our basic needs are not met, it makes it more difficult to maintain all aspects of our health, including our mental health. In this way, food insecurity can lead to stress, anxiety, and other poor health outcomes. In children especially, the connection between hunger and mental health is clear. A study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that severe hunger is "associated with higher reported anxiety/depression among school-aged children," including reported rates of anxiety nearly double that of children with no hunger.<sup>1</sup> For children without adequate access to food, schools have a crucial role to play in providing for their overall wellness.

Just as food insecurity may affect mental health, one's mental health can also impact their ability to work and afford food for themselves and their families. Research by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that adults with a mental health disability are up to five times more likely to live in a household that is food insecure. By addressing food

<sup>1</sup>Linda Weinreb, Cheryl Wehler, Jennifer Perloff, Richard Scott, David Hosmer, Linda Sagor, Craig Gundersen; Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health. *Pediatrics* October 2002; 110 (4): e41. 10.1542/peds.110.4.e41

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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insecurity and other social determinants of health, we have the opportunity to ensure that individuals and their families have the chance to get and stay well.

SB 499 takes steps to address hunger and protect the overall health and wellbeing of Granite Staters in need, including school-aged children, older adults, and people with disabilities. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend OTP for SB 499.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Samuel C. Hawkins